

# Laser strike at Metro-bound jet joins a dangerous trend

Eric D. Lawrence and Bart Jansen, Detroit Free Press and USA Today 10:59 p.m. EST November 12, 2015



(Photo: CANDACE WEST, KRT)

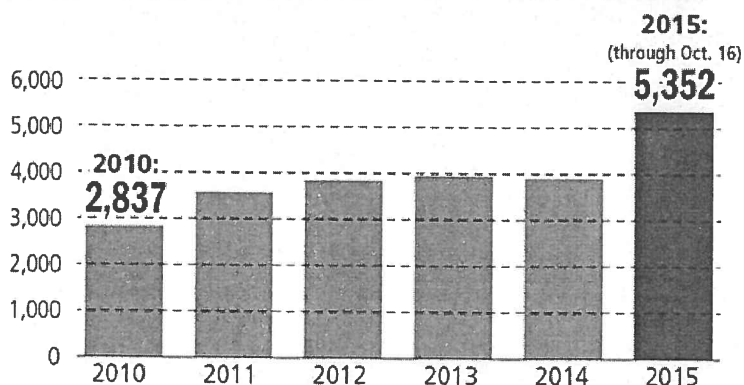
An aircraft was inbound to Detroit Metro Airport overnight Wednesday when it was struck by a laser beam — one of 20 similar incidents during the same time period nationwide.

The plane was flying at 3,000 feet, eight miles northeast of the airport, when the laser beam illuminated it from the left side, according to Elizabeth Cory, a spokeswoman for the Federal Aviation Administration.

No one was hurt, but the potentially dangerous incident is only the latest example of a troubling trend.

The FAA recorded 5,352 laser strikes through Oct. 16, up from 2,837 for all of 2010. Since last year, area media reports have chronicled numerous laser strikes in Michigan and the surrounding region, including incidents in Grand Rapids, Macomb County and Windsor. Those incidents reportedly involved passenger jets climbing and landing and U.S. Coast Guard helicopters on training exercises.

## INCREASED LASER STRIKES ON AIRCRAFT



SOURCE: FAA

USA TODAY, DETROIT FREE PRESS

Increased laser strikes on aircraft (Photo: USA TODAY, Detroit Free Press)

Such strikes can temporarily blind pilots at critical times when they are taking off and landing.

"In some cases in the past, pilots have reported eye injuries that required medical treatment," according to an FAA statement.



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Laser into cockpit of plane traced to Christmas display

(<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/11/10/laser-cockpit-plane-traced-christmas-display/75513918/>)

Brian Lassaline, a spokesman for Detroit Metro Airport, said airport police are ready to assist the airlines in dealing with laser pointing incidents, and he noted that pinpointing their origin can be difficult.

The FAA noted that "shining a laser at an aircraft is a federal crime that the U.S. vigorously pursues."

People convicted of pointing a laser at a plane can be sentenced to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

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Not all laser strikes are intentional. A Christmas display was to blame for a laser being shined into a plane's cockpit while it was approaching Mason County Airport in Pere Marquette Township near Ludington earlier this month, according to an Associated Press report.

In addition to the Detroit Metro incident, pilots and airports reported three laser strikes in the New York City/Newark, N.J. area early in the evening, followed by three incidents in Texas, where jets were struck while preparing to land at Dallas Love Field in Texas. Other laser strikes from the ground were reported in Jamestown, N.Y.; Los Angeles, Oakland, Palm Springs, Ontario and Sacramento, Calif.; Covington and Danville, Ky.; Salt Lake City; Albuquerque, N.M.; St. Petersburg, Fla.; Springfield, Ill., and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

At Detroit Metro, the FAA recorded 33 laser strikes in 2014 and 36 through Oct. 16 this year.

Some airports have reported more than 100 laser strikes this year: Los Angeles with 197; Phoenix with 183; Houston with 151; Las Vegas with 132, and Dallas-Ft. Worth with 115.

On July 15 during one 90-minute period, 11 airliners and one military aircraft reported laser strikes near New York City-area airports. Those incidents remain under investigation by the FAA, FBI and New Jersey state police.

In 2011, the FAA began imposing civil penalties on people who pointed lasers at planes. Then, the maximum fine was \$11,000. Congress upped the penalties in a 2012 FAA law that made it a federal crime to point lasers at an aircraft. From February 2012-13, the FAA investigated 152 cases and took action in 96.

Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., in June urged the Food and Drug Administration to ban the sale of high-powered, long-range lasers, which are relatively inexpensive and easy to buy. His recommendation came after five flights were targeted heading to New York's JFK Airport.

The Air Line Pilots Association, a union representing 50,000 pilots, has worked with the FAA and FBI on educational campaigns to discourage people from pointing lasers at planes, with the phrase "Don't let a prank lead to prison."

"We will need to do more to fully engage in a solution that combines education, reporting, enforcement and technology to protect North American air transportation," association President Capt. Tim Canoll said.

The Thursday incidents included Chopper 4 of New York's NBC affiliate, while it flew over Prospect Heights. The helicopter pinpointed the source of the laser from 1,500 feet and police detained two people, the station reported. The helicopter for New York's ABC affiliate was also struck near Newark airport, and the FBI had a suspect in custody, the station reported.

The Dallas incidents involved a Southwest Airlines jet, a Virgin America jet and a private business jet, each about 11 miles southeast of the city and flying about 3,000 to 4,000 feet in the air, the FAA said.

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